

THE ANTIDOTE FOR CHRISTIANS CAUGHT IN THEOLOGICAL HERESY

February 28, 2001 (Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, wayoflife.org, fbns@wayoflife.org) - The following article is by Dr. Thomas M. Strouse [Emmanuel Baptist Theological Seminary, 296 New Britain Ave., Newington, CT 06111] and is used by permission:

THE PAULINE ANTIDOTE FOR CHRISTIANS CAUGHT IN THEOLOGICAL HERESY: AN EXAMINATION AND APPLICATION OF 2 TIM. 2:24-26

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul warned the Ephesian church about encroaching theological error. In fact, he warned about heretics spreading their heresy in the very church Paul started in Ephesus, saying, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). Heresy, coming from the Greek verb meaning "to choose," connotes "a theological choice contrary to norm." The Jews considered the early Christians "the sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5); Paul condemned "heresies" as a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:20); and Peter warned against "damnable heresies" in which false teachers attempted to mislead immature believers (2 Pet. 2:1-2). In these biblical examples, it is clear that Christians, to their detriment, may believe and practice heresy, which is the belief in and practice of doctrine contrary to the norm of the Scriptural teaching of orthodox Christianity.

Is it possible for Christians to be ensnared in theological heresy? Paul answers in the affirmative, warning about and identifying heretics, and giving the antidote for Christians trapped by Satan in heresy. One heresy in which many Christians and some fundamentalists are ensnared is the heresy of the Westcott-Hort Textual Criticism theory. The purpose of this essay is to determine what Paul meant in the context of II Tim. 2:24-26, to understand its correct interpretation, and to make proper application of the text for today. The apostle gives the antidote for Christians caught in theological heresy, even the theological heresy of the Westcott-Hort Textual Criticism theory.

CONTEXT

Gnosticism, or the expression of the tenets espoused by Satan in the Garden of Eden, that is, the deathlessness (i.e., "reincarnation") and deification (i.e., "humanism") of man, has been the lie of the ages (Rom. 1:25) and will be the lie of the Tribulation (2 Thess. 2:9). Paul had warned the Ephesian church about this incipient Gnosticism in The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Timothy, stating "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called" (I Tim. 6:20). The corollary tenet of Gnosticism is that "flesh is evil." In the Ephesian church the Gnostic heretics, who were duped by demons, taught that marital flesh and animal flesh were evil (1 Tim. 4:1-5), that the resurrection doctrine was allegorical (II Tim. 2:18), and that man should be exalted (II Tim. 3:2-5). Paul

countered the Gnosticism in the Ephesian church with the antidote to Garden Gnosticism, the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle stated, "and without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh" (I Tim. 3:16; cf. I Jn. 4:3). Satan hates the anti-gnostic doctrine of the incarnation of God (I Jn. 2:22; 4:3; et al). His attack upon the Lord's churches throughout the centuries manifests this hatred in the form of theological heresy. The churches Paul was instrumental in starting were bombarded with heretical teaching. The Apostle delineates the biblical antidote for theological heresy among New Testament church members: a strong dose of biblical teaching.

EXEGESIS

Paul's instruction to Timothy was in the context of the local New Testament church. This Epistle was written to the Ephesian church (I Tim. 1:3; cf. Acts 20:17 ff.), which apparently met in a house (I Tim. 3:4-5), and needed purging (II Tim. 2:20-23). Some of the heretics in the Ephesian church, such as Hymenaeus and Alexander, had already been disciplined ("may learn" ?????????? in I Tim 1:20) by the church (cf. I Cor. 5:1-5). Additional heretics, namely Hymenaeus (cf. I Tim. 1:20) and Philetus taught their cancerous ("canker" in II Tim. 2:17) heresy about the allegorical "resurrection" (v. 18).

The apostle's antidote, addressed to the servant of the Lord, which designation included Timothy, listed several characteristics in utilizing the proper method for deliverance from heresy. First, the negative quality "striving" or quarreling must be avoided. Truth is not settled by obstreperous arguing. Second, positive qualities must attend the servant's task of teaching. He must be gentle, apt to teach, and patient or forbearing. The force of the deliverance is in the proper, Christ-like demeanor as well as the message. The message, no doubt the Words of Scripture (II Tim. 3:15-16), must be expressed in meekness. This Christ-like spirit, coupled with the Scripture, makes a powerful atmosphere in which one should attempt to recover heretics.

The ones needing Paul's antidote seem to be the followers of the heretics, rather than the heretics themselves (i.e., Hymenaeus and Philetus). These followers actually "oppose themselves," since the false teaching they believe is contrary to the truth they have (in the person of Christ and the written revelation). The Apostle encouraged Timothy with the hope that God might give Christians repentance through the instruction in Scripture, and unto a full knowledge of truth. Scripture, according to Paul, was the antidote for Christians caught in heretical teaching, and the sole means to help them recover themselves out of the theological trap of the Devil. The recovery program Paul advocated was the straightforward instruction of the Word of God. Spiritual recovery comes from the theological teaching of Scripture to heretical Christians taken captive by him, i.e., Satan) to [do] the will of that one, i.e., God). The Lord wants to deliver Christians caught in the theological heresy of Satan, and upon their change of mind about the heresy, the Lord does deliver repentant Christians unto service for Him.

APPLICATION

Satan has attacked the New Testament Scriptures since their initial inscripturation. Both the text and the canon of Scripture were attacked early and universally (2 Pet. 3:16; II Thess. 2:2). Christians need to be delivered from this ongoing Satanic heresy manifested in the Westcott-Hort Textual Criticism theory. There should be no question that the Westcott-Hort Textual Criticism theory is heretical, since its origin, content, and results manifest unbelieving anti-supernaturalism. Although Westcott and Hort did not originate, but only popularized, the tenets of Textual Criticism, rationalistic scholars of higher criticism did lay the basic foundation for the principles of Textual Criticism. For instance, rationalists such as Fell, Mill, Bentley, Wettstein, Semler, Griesbach, Scholz, Lachmann, and Tischendorf espoused the abandonment of the Textus Receptus, using a growing list of evolutionary and antisupernaturalistic principles which became the foundation for Textual Criticism. Westcott and Hort popularized these principles in their work entitled *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, and the modern Textual Criticism theory and modern versions movement are built upon their textual theory.

The Westcott-Hort Textual Criticism theory proposes to restore the fourth century Greek text, based on the Catholic (B) and gnostic-laced ? and Egyptian papyri manuscripts. It argues that there was no textual tampering. It uses inapplicable Genealogies, assumed Text-types, and a supposed Lucianic Recension to dispose of the Textus Receptus. The Westcott-Hort Textual Criticism theory does not advocate the role of the Holy Spirit in either inspiration or preservation of Scripture. This theory categorically rejects the "perfect Words preservation" taught in passages such as "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mt. 24:35; cf. Psm. 12:6-7).

The fruit of the Westcott-Hort Textual Criticism theory is bibliological heresy. The fruit of this theory not only culminates in a false doctrine of preservation, but it also ends up in the modernist view of errancy in the autographa. For instance, Bruce Metzger advocates that Matthew incorporated errors in his royal genealogy of Christ (Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. [NY: United Bible Societies, 1975], p. 1). Furthermore, Daniel Wallace affirms that Mark inscripturated error in his original in Mk. 1:2 (Daniel Wallace, "Mark 1:2 and New Testament Textual Criticism," 1997 Biblical Studies Press; <http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/mark1-2htm>, pp. 1-3).

CONCLUSION

Conservative Christians, including some fundamentalists, are beginning to embrace the modernist view of errancy in the originals. Biblical fundamentalists should be enraged at the prospect of modernism coming into New Testament churches through the extra-biblical authority of fundamental scholarship which embraces the heresy of the Westcott-Hort Textual Criticism theory and teaches such to Christians. Pastors of fundamental, New Testament churches have the responsibility to expose the heresy of the Westcott-Hort Textual Criticism theory and exposit the self-attestation of the Bible to its own inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility and preservation. Should fundamental Baptists stand idly by and coddle "good, godly" Christian professors and Baptist pastors who teach Christians the heretical system of the Westcott-Hort Textual Criticism theory?

The Apostle Paul gives the appropriate answer: A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject" (Tit. 3:10).